

Live or dead? is theatre in Bali dialogic?

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Somewhere at the back of their minds - far behind the veneer of politically correct postmodernism, below that gurgling cesspit, *das Es*, as much imaginary as real we are now told, beyond even preoccupation with their promotion and pension prospects - resides the intransigent belief among academics that media mediate something. We still widely take it for granted that form is distinct from content: texts contain meaning, words may reveal the truth, the medium is not the message when the (increasingly greasy) chips are down. Now what has all this to do with the present collection? Simply, it pervades the terms of our inquiries, and so closes down ways of critically considering the issues. For example, much research on audio-visual media asks questions of the order of 'how does the medium affect the text/message/audience?' At first sight such questions seems eminently reasonable, indeed natural, but quite what do they presuppose? In most versions they presume that there is a content, which is notionally separate from, and which ought to transcend, the language, the medium, the circumstances of communication. This is of course a cornerstone of European thinking: the dichotomy between body (the medium) and mind (the thought). This distinction underwrites the centrality of the knowing subject, here the academic, who is able to encompass, understand and transcend the great divide, so tipping the scales firmly towards mind over medium. It also implies that some - more authentic? - performances are unmediated, whereas in fact we are always dealing with multiple and sequential kinds of mediation. In this chapter I wish to question how suitable such an epistemology is to the study of performance and media, or 'mediatization' (which I take to be the implications or consequences which mass, or electronic, mediation has on performance), in Indonesia - or indeed anywhere else. Fine tuning the questions for the umpteenth time is merely rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic. The alternative may well require us to abandon our familiar ways of analysis and embrace a radical option. Coincidentally it is one which, I argue, articulates Balinese ideas about performance.

Background

Balinese actors often say they much prefer performing before live audiences than in recording studios. In this chapter I shall examine some of the differences discernible in the same plays as acted in front of village audiences and as broadcast on Indonesian state television. Such a study suggests that far more is at stake than actors' unfamiliarity with the exigencies of performing for television, with the inevitable differences between acting on stage and in television studios.¹ Balinese theatre, especially in the genres I shall be considering, is largely extemporized around a minimal plot. So the circumstances under which the play takes place and the performance of the audience are crucial to what happens. Theatre involves not just ad libbing the exchanges between actors, but also a less obvious, but overlapping, dialogue between actors and audience. In a different and little remarked upon way, the audience also performs. Acting to camera, with or without a tame studio audience, therefore transforms the occasion. 'Mediatizing' therefore is a more complex issue than just

¹ The appropriate term is 'actor-dancers', because dancing is as much a part of many forms of theatre as is acting. I abbreviate it to 'actors' for convenience.

the effect of television recording and broadcasting on theatre. For a start, it invites us to consider what is involved in dialogic models of social action and in communication itself.

An inquiry into what happens with theatre once performances start to be reproduced in different ways raises wider questions. For a start, from the moment that people become familiar with reading stories in newspapers, books or as cartoons, with hearing them on radio or seeing them on television, the idea of theatre itself is transformed. The possibility is born of discriminating nostalgically between authentic, 'live' performances and their mechanical or electronic reproduction. In fact, however, it is the contrast itself, which creates the conditions of possibility of a privileged, essential, ordinary form, against which divergent versions may be compared. Once theatre is reproduced electronically, live performance itself changes, because it is always framed against what it is not.²

Theatre in Bali is a vast topic. Not only are there many differing, changing and new genres, but until recently there were innumerable, local, part-time clubs of actors and dancers, besides the better-known professional troupes. My concern however is with one aspect of theatre in Bali, that is as a set of changing practices. This raises questions of how televising theatre affects performing and viewing as practices.

How I became interested in studying theatre is germane to my argument for a dialogic study of social life. Where possible, I have tried in different ways to involve the intellectual concerns of those I am working with in the research. At the beginning of a visit to Bali in 1988-89 to research discourses of development broadly conceived, I brought together the people I had worked with on a previous visit and asked what they thought of the idea, what was important to examine and how I should go about it?³ This led to a discussion of what were in their view the important occasions, sites and personnel involved in the rapid change taking place in Bali.

Interestingly no one mentioned government development initiatives and quickly dismissed their importance when I mentioned them. Partly perhaps because tourism affected those present indirectly rather than directly through art shops and the handicraft industry, they concluded that tourism might be a major source of wealth and a force to be reckoned with, but how it impacted on Balinese society depended in turn upon other processes. All were media occasions. The most important of these, they agreed, were public meetings, pronouncements from the non-manifest (*niskala*) world through mediums (*balian*), and theatre. Of these, they

² Although Balinese actors and audiences would on occasion speak of a performance being dead (*mati*) or, more rarely, alive (*urip*), there are qualitative differences with the English distinction, in which live is privileged. *Mati* suggests flat, pedestrian, indifferent, that the performance did not come off. *Urip*, as I have met it, refers to those special moments, especially when a particular actor is what we would call 'inspired' and which Balinese call *mataksu*. The live or dead dichotomy in the title is therefore my distinction, not one I have heard Balinese make.

³ The people I asked were from the ward of Pisangkaja in the village of Tengahpadang (both pseudonyms) in the mountainous part of South Bali where I have worked since 1970. A number of people turned up in the course of the discussion. The most important were the priest of the local Pura Dalem, the *adat* (customary village) head of Pisangkaja, an old actor and two other villagers noted for their oratorical skills. Below I refer to the comments of a group of villagers on theatre. Only the *adat* head and the actor were common to both groups.

considered theatre to be the most important, because that was where recognition and discussion about the significance of what was happening was aired publicly. On reflection, theatre seemed therefore a more sensible starting point for research than a study of development projects and policy-making (which always threatened to become an exercise in ideological massage anyway). And, rather than treat Balinese as able only to provide raw material for the knowing anthropological mind, it had the advantage of making critical discussion itself part of the object of study.

Subsequently I noticed that in the evenings the coffee and food stalls, which had previously been the centre of social life, were quiet or had closed down. If Balinese theatre were being broadcast on television, the main square was largely deserted. When I asked those at the original meeting how television fitted in the picture, they admitted that their previous analysis was becoming increasingly retrospective. Not only did people mostly watch theatre on television, but what they saw on television was forcing ordinary people to rethink the world about them.⁴

The impact of television on theatre can be judged by the fact that, on the best estimate, over eighty percent of theatre troupes in Bali disappeared during the 1980s, as audiences were bent on watching only the best, once they knew what it was like. With theatre becoming a mainstay of local television peak-hour scheduling, I found myself caught up in frequent conversations between actors, whether as performers or viewers, who used to complain about the rigidity of the medium. As a central part of the television project has been recording broadcast Balinese theatre, a way of testing and fleshing out the actors' appreciations was to commission performances of the plays previously recorded from television.⁵ We chose the occasion of local temple festivals in Tengahpadang, because that is when Balinese themselves put on theatre plays.

By the time it came to record the temple performances, we had the problem of how to decide which examples to request from the large range of possibilities in the archive. Again, the obvious way was to involve local aficionados of theatre and ask which plays they had enjoyed the most and which they also considered to be good examples of their respective genres. The choice of plays excerpted below is partly their's.

Primarily for reasons of cost, we restricted ourselves to the two most popular and commonly performed genres. The first, *Derama Gong* (hereafter simply *Derama*), sprang up in the late 1960s, not coincidentally after the abortive coup d'état in 1965. The plots are

⁴ The follow-up to these thoughts led to a project to record and study Balinese television, the Balinese Television Project (an account of which can be found in Hobart 1999a) and my subsequent research on mass media in Indonesia. The recordings discussed below are part of an archive of over 1,500 hours of cultural materials broadcast by state television since September 1990, a selection of 150 hours of which have been encoded in MPEG and are available on CD for the use of scholars. One of the plays discussed below, *Keris Pusaka Sakti*, is in the course of being translated into English.

⁵ The camera-woman for the live performances was Dr Felicia Hughes-Freeland, who had extensive experience in ethnographic film and who collaborated on the television project during its first three years (see Hughes-Freeland 1992).

sometimes adaptations of written stories from the Pañji cycle, more often they are fictive creations. Sometimes, they are notionally set in the Javanese kingdoms of Kuripan, Daha and so on of the Pañji stories, sometimes not. Although the period in which they are set is pre-colonial Java or Bali, they are ‘modern’ in the sense that the characters draw upon new fashions, such as the hero and heroine holding hands, and introduce contemporary themes and interests. Derama is in spoken Balinese; song and dance are fairly incidental.

By contrast, Arja is of far longer standing. De Zoete and Spies described it in *Dance and Drama in Bali* as corresponding ‘most nearly to our idea of opera, or rather of musical comedy... sentimental situations are developed as nowhere else on the Balinese stage [prior that is to Derama]. There is something of the comedy of manners in its construction’ (1938: 196-97, my parentheses). Depending on fashion, some male rôles, especially refined ones, are played by women, while some of the coarser female rôles may be played by men. The plots of Arja are drawn from a wide range of literary sources, the Mahabharata, Javanese romances, Chinese tales of passion and others beside. The aristocratic figures sing, part of the time at least, in verse of different metres, *pupuh*, partly in *kawi* (a literary register of Balinese and Javanese), partly in high Balinese, and are paraphrased by their servants or ministers. For a time during the 1970s and 1980s, Arja lost out in popularity to Derama. By about 1990 however Arja, which retained a certain classic integrity, had come back into vogue. Audiences had become bored with Derama, which had become increasingly derivative. With hindsight Derama looks increasingly like an ideological form peculiarly suited to the New Order régime, like Séndratari (on which see Hough 1992). Based on invented stories in a never-never land, where the good win through and the bad get their just deserts, Derama bears little relationship to any contemporary social, political or economic realm of lived experience.⁶

The Derama in question was first serialized on Balinese television between March and April and the Arja between June and July of 1991. The Derama troupe was one of the best known on the island, Bhara Budaya, and the Arja actors were from the state radio company, Radio Republik Indonesia. The live performances were filmed as part of the television project in August 1992 during temple festivals in Tengahpadang. Both live and televised performances lasted some seven hours. The dialogue was extemporized in both, as was some of the singing in the live Arja. The bare outlines of the plots were set, but the order of scenes changed somewhat, especially in the Derama, partly because there were slight differences in the cast for the live version and this encouraged them to play to the actors’ strengths and preferences. I am not concerned here with the structure of the plots, but with the relationships between the various parties involved in the occasion as a whole.

⁶ The absence of genres which address the problems of ordinary people in contemporary Indonesia is a striking feature of Balinese theatre. This has not always been for lack of trying. The few attempts I know of to mount plays with social realistic themes were met with severe warnings by the authorities. A review of the television project’s holdings show that local television has been more experimental. Before events in May 1998 however, these too remained conservative, not least for fear of censorship. This does not mean that theatre is incapable of social criticism and commentary. On the contrary, Balinese are skilled at developing analogy and extrapolating contemporary implications. However this gives a decided advantage to the well-crafted plots of the more classic genres (see Hobart 1991).

If they found a play was interesting, my Balinese colleagues would tend to talk about it, sometimes for days afterwards. I spoke at length subsequently with several of the actors, but my translation and analysis of the performances also relies heavily on the commentaries provided by a number of villagers from Tengahpadang who were enthusiastic and often knowledgeable theatre-goers. As I have outlined elsewhere (e.g. Hobart 1999a), I shall mention only the immediately relevant figures with whom I worked as a group, the setting in which Balinese most often talk over theatre. Three were themselves actors. The oldest was a well-known Arja teacher and dancer, then in his early nineties. The ex-village head previously mentioned also happened to be a skilled player of ministers and servants in Derama. There was also a wealthy farmer and devotee of shadow theatre; a very clever, but poor, flower-seller; and a tenant farmer who knew a great deal about theatre, but who assumed a guise of naïve stupidity in company. His granddaughter, who was training as a actress-dancer at the Academy of Performing Arts (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia) in Denpasar, also took part. Various other friends and relatives who had watched the plays would drop in and out of the discussions.

Warming up the audience

A favourite theme among actors, and a corollary of interactive theatre, is the difficulties of getting the play started in the first place. Even if you are experienced and have danced in a place many times before, you do not know who comprises the audience that night, what mood they are in, nor what they will respond well to. (So the meal served before the performance is an occasion to sense the venue, topical local concerns and so forth.) The problems of performing on television become obvious. You know little of your audience, nor have any means of gauging their receptiveness. Not only is there no script to rely on, or to blame; but Balinese audiences require to be wooed into becoming engaged.

In Derama, it is commonly servants, either male or female, playing comic rôles whose job it is to warm up the audience.⁷ So let us have a look at how the same pair of male servants worked a television audience to a local live show. The play was about Gusti Ayu Ratih (the title of the play), the sheltered and beautiful daughter of a minister to the court of Daha to whom the heir to the throne becomes attracted. He seduces and impregnates her but, ensorcelled by a princess from another kingdom (who lusts after him), he abandons her. Ayu Ratih goes mad and runs wild in the forest before a wise hermit realizes the nature of the problem and sets her and the prince to rights. The opening half-hour or so has virtually nothing to do with the plot other than setting the scene. Its function is quite different.

The televised version

⁷ In Arja the task falls again to a servant, the demanding female rôle of *Condong*. The word for her male counterpart, *Panasar*, nicely suggests what is involved. The root is *dasar*, basis, foundation: it is the anchor rôle.

Two close servants (*parekan tatadan*) of the prince, Gangsar and Gingsir, entered and began talking about the state of affairs in the kingdom of Daha (a section known as *Angucap-ucap*). They expatiated upon how well the king ruled the kingdom and recited his praises (*panyerita pangajum*). The scene was set, the audience knew where they were narratively. The servants then tried out various routines to establish what would make this particular audience laugh (*ngarereh sané kasenengin antuk panonton*). They started in low key with two jokes about there being many food-sellers around the theatre, which depended simply on saying the same thing but in different formulations.

This provided the springboard for their first routine. They moved to listing the kinds of cakes on sale in the stalls round about the open theatre stage, so laying the foundations of a patter which would lead them to a popular Javanese song on television via a pun on a kind of cake, *Ketuk Lèndri*, which is close to the title of a song, *Getuk Lèndri*. In the course of this, an interesting exchange took place.

Gingsir: Bullet cakes. (*Jaja batun bedil*)
Gangsar: What?
Gingsir: Bullet cakes have been just been going like wild fire.
Gangsar: Where's that?
Gingsir: (*Delivering the punch line.*) In Kuwait and in Iraq, bullets have been selling well!
Gangsar: You've only seen the image (on the television screen) and you're saying they sell well. Huh!¹

The two servants were working up to introducing a song. The problem is how to do so seemingly smoothly and naturally, without having to fall back on some kind of the callow line like: 'Now I shall sing'.⁸ As the cake in question was largely unknown outside the provincial capital Denpasar, they listed its contents and told people it was *ngatop*, 'the tops', a vogue word among the young at that time, at whom the song was primarily aimed.

The song made the spectators laugh, not because of the words, which were Javanese and they did not know, but at Gingsir's dancing a Javanese pop song and movements in the style of *Jogèd Bungbung*, a genre in which a female dancer invites and dances flirtatiously serially with male members of the audience. In the middle Gingsir wove idiosyncratic noises into the song: *Kaing! Kaing!* which is the Balinese verbalization of a dog barking (Woof! Woof!). Gangsar told him to shut up, *Cèk! Cèk!*, the rebuke used to silence a dog. They switched to a take-off of the sort of pop group which performs *Getuk Lèndri*. Gingsir swung his arms and hands out to his sides ever more wildly in a take-off of disco dancing, until he finally grabbed Gangsar - who looked suitably mortified - by the genitals.

⁸ By contrast, the Australian actor, Barry Humphries makes his stage character, Dame Edna Everage, purposefully blunt at this point: 'I feel a song coming on'.

At several points what the spectators are to make of what happens is not clearly determined. For instance, is the goosing of Gangsar just clowning around, an 'accident' of Gingsir's exuberant performance? Or, in the context of a Javanese song, is it a rude comment on the loose, and ambivalent, sexuality, which Balinese stereotypically attribute to Javanese? Is Gingsir's barking dog in the middle of the song merely any incongruity which will make the audience laugh? Or are there potential resonances about the fact that dogs are known to be *haram* to muslims, which most Javanese are? To what extent is the song about broadening Balinese horizons, or about domesticating, or making fun of, Javanese popular culture, which Balinese sometimes fear is becoming dominant in Indonesia?

The range of interpretive possibilities at many points in the play is left open, as is the possibility of not bothering to think too much and just to enjoy what goes on. If interpretive closure of the text hinges in some way on the original intention of the playwright, then it is often impossible in practice to know what this might be and how we would decide upon it (Hirsch 1967). In what sense then is it useful even to try to determine validatable and unambiguous intentionality (as Ricoeur insists is possible, 1976) in these quick-silver, ad-libbed, unrepeatable exchanges which depend so much upon the moment? The response in media studies to the problems of interpretation has been to shift the emphasis from closure of the text to the audience and its 'preferred reading'. This still leaves awkward questions, because the audience is as problematically an idealized entity as is the text. How do you determine exactly who, or what, the audience is (Ang 1991), let alone what they are thinking? In what sense, and under what circumstances, is it useful to talk of audiences 'reading'? How, and on what authority, do you extrapolate unitary, coherent preferences from this? And what underwrites the equivalence of what spectators experience or think and academic 'readings' of these? In answer to the last two questions, I prefer to give significantly greater weight than do most media scholars and even anthropologists to what the performers, local experts and lay people had to say as part of the analysis.

So what did members of the audience make of this scene? (I did not have a chance to ask the two actors at the time.) Rather than centring about a clear reading or interpretation, the commentators treated the scene as providing an occasion for talking about a whole range of issues from how well the cast acted compared to other performances they had watched recently or remembered vividly; to discussing which bits they enjoyed, found funny, sad or moving; to expatiating upon cryptic sections of dialogue or remarks the actors made; while those who had themselves been actors tended to frame their remarks with comments on technique, timing and so on.⁹ Even my apparently straightforward description above of the scene relies on extrapolating from the criss-crossing opinions, judgements, divagations, misapprehensions and arguments, resolved or otherwise, between the commentators. The idea that you could uncritically impose hermeneutic practices honed upon the credo of the eternal unchanging text to elicit a hidden and transcendental truth (exemplified by the Bible)

⁹ Elsewhere I have argued (1999b) that, in theatre, Balinese elaborate rather than translate. Both intention and preferred reading models presuppose some version of the copy, or correspondence, theory, the task of interpretation being a more accurate, valid or full re-presentation of something. Theory and practice are then both bent to the demand of this perfectible repetition (Rorty 1980; cf. Deleuze 1994). My concern, by contrast, is to focus on the intellectual practices by which people engage in commentary and criticism.

on such labile, occasional, immediate and unrepeatable performances would be farcical, were it not still the normal academic way of proceeding.

At suitable junctures I asked the group of commentators direct questions. Did they find the exchange funny? Not particularly. Gangsar and Gingsir were often much better, but they had to be careful what they said in front of television cameras. More important, the audience (from Tohpati, near Denpasar) were 'raw' (*matah*). Why then did the television audience laugh? Because they were taken by surprise by the unexpectedly topical reference. Did anyone have an idea why they used that particular song? The group often gives live shows around Bali apart from their televised appearances. So they have begun to run out of fresh jokes and have chosen a song which they know is likely to appeal to the young, while the older spectators enjoyed watching the send-up of the song. The overriding aim in any event is to make the audience like them, appreciate their performance and want to pay to see them again.

A remark by Gangsar neatly exposes the fatuity of interpretive analysis, which do not fully take into account the presuppositions of the actors and spectators. Why, I asked, in the middle of the exchange about cakes, did Gangsar suddenly cut in, breaking the flow, to remind Gingsir that he didn't know what had actually happened in the Gulf War, he only saw the *lawat*, image, impression, shadow. Without an appreciation of Balinese epistemological ideas about the relationship, and consequent practices of discriminating, between verifiable perceptions and appearances, the reprimand makes little sense and appears just another example of the irrationality or superfluity of the native mind. However it is only if you reverse normal procedure and review the analytical presuppositions using those of the object of study that the shock occurs. The Balinese comedians, delightfully, find support in Baudrillard's infamous work, *The gulf war did not take place*, a neat and parallel critique of Euro-American habits of conflating what they see on television with reality.¹⁰

¹⁰ Balinese distinguish carefully between the reliability of different kinds of ways of knowing about something (Hobart 1985; Matilal 1986). Some scholars have apparently used Baudrillard's book to argue that he is committed to idealism or relativism or both (e.g. Sokal & Bricmont 1998). This requires such a naïve realist reading that it would seem more likely to be a postmodernist ploy to discredit their opponents, were it not for the fact that postmodernism is effectively an imaginary. The process of imagining itself is a fine example of the displacement, fracture of desire, fragmentation of identity and failure of representation conventionally attributed to postmodernism by self-confessed experts. Those who champion or deride this empty category are hard pressed to name anyone who will admit to being a postmodernist, as opposed to being labelled as such by their admirers or detractors. As far as I know, the only person who claims to be postmodernist is Gayatri Spivak, which rather makes the point. The acclaimed arch-priest of postmodernism, Baudrillard, quite reasonably says he does not know what it would be were it to exist (see 1993).

The live version

The play took place in front of the Pura Dalem Kauh in Tengahpadang during the temple festival there. The seating for several hundred was packed out and there was a further large crowd floating between the play, temple, stalls and gambling groups.

The play started conventionally, with a deep voice through the microphone offering an apology, *pangaksama*, for any mistakes or faults on the part of the actors, a request to Divinity that the audience enjoy the performance and to bring *prama santi*, peace of mind.

The same servants, Gangsar and Gingsir, were the first on stage. There happened to be two people of the same names in the village. So the servants started by joking about how I Gingsir (who worked for the Bintang beer company in Denpasar) had to get permission to come home for the festival. They then made a play of confusing the fact that I Gingsir and I Gangsar in Tengahpadang are in-laws with their own relationship. They proceeded to show an equal fluency with the names of the stall-owners round the stage. The aim was to surprise and please the audience by showing that they are *au fait* with the local scene.¹¹

After this preamble, Gangsar and Gingsir started complaining that they were poor servants, who just got left-overs (*lungsuran*) to eat and one chequered (*polèng*) sarong each to wear. How much better the audience was turned out than they! Obviously the audience appreciated what is fitting according to Hindu religion and were dressed suitably for a temple festival. While comic characters often comment on what is appropriate, dress and current affairs, I found this rather heavy-handed, although the commentators seemed less worried about it. It sounded like a sermon by organic intellectuals on state religious policy as refracted through local government.

Gingsir protested that he was ashamed (*kimud*) to go to court in old clothes. But how was he to get new ones? He had no money. They despaired, until they suddenly came up with the idea that they could get money if one of them pretended to be dead. Ni Wayan Suci (a stall-keeper) would give Rp. 1,000 (then about U.S.\$ 0.50) when she heard her relative, I Gangsar, was dead (a further play on local knowledge). With some splendid mathematics, they worked out that, if they could manage to persuade two people to give Rp. 1,000 each, they would have *two million Rupiah* and be rich! After some persuasion Gangsar agreed to mimic being dead. Gingsir whipped out a length of white cloth and put it over Gangsar, who promptly leapt up and ran in fear off stage (because witches would think he really *was* a corpse and come and eat him). Gingsir had to go off and entice him back¹²

¹¹ On a small matter of ethnography, Clifford Geertz argued that Balinese 'anonymize' personal identity, by ensuring that the personal names of adults are never used in public and are not even known to most people (1973). If Geertz were correct, then the joke would have fallen flat, which it did not. Nor does it square with quite mature adults' names being bellowed across the stage to a mixed audience of 500 people or more.

¹² Once again, it is central to much of Geertz's view of Bali that public life is a sort of stage, in which being embarrassed, *lek*, is really 'stage-fright', a fear that one will not perform adequately. Yet there is little sense here that Gingsir suffers from stage fright at the idea of appearing at court in rags. Geertz's analysis, if anything, draws attention away from considering the range and circumstances of publicly recognized emotion.

No sooner had the white cloth been put over him again than Gangsar had to get up to have a very public pee in the shrubbery which made up the back of the set. The two then sat down for a moment and gloated over what they could buy with all the money they would get. They would buy a car! Gangsar lay down again and promptly got an enormous erection. Gingsir asked him ‘what dead person stands up like that?’ and detumesced Gangsar hard with his foot, to a bar from the orchestra. Gingsir then threw himself into a wild fit of mourning, lifting his sarong to expose a vast pair of red underpants (not the sort of thing you do in a televised performance) and hurled himself about the stage howling in grief. Gangsar ran off again in fear and had to be dragged back by Gingsir, who explained that he, Gingsir, had to cry realistically if they were to get people to believe them and so pay up.

Now Balinese are noted for their restraint in mourning.¹³ So, once again how the audience is to take this exchange is left open. There is no final interpretation. It could be a commentary on, or caricature of, the difficulties, at times impossibility, of ordinary people so rigorously repressing their feelings. It could be a play on what the actors have seen on television and so frames Balinese practice. Even if it is a play for laughs by inverting ‘normal’ behaviour, we are in the realm of a potentially complex commentary. By this stage, it should be evident that the task of theatre is not simply about attempting to represent the normal, or ideological, but at the least is about encompassing quite different points of view, a double-, or multiple-voiced commentary. It is a singular form of commentary, because the commentators do not set themselves above what they comment on. On the contrary, they exemplify and embody it. In other words, we are dealing with the coexistence of different points of view, even epistemologies, where the actors, who are at once their own authors, refuse to allow themselves that ‘surplus of vision’ which so distinguishes the authoritative author. The complex author of the play, the actors with the help of the audience, has no superior point of view, nor do they predetermine, except in the minimal terms set by the plot, how the rôle shall develop.¹⁴

To return to the scene, Gingsir then went into a sort of comic dance to show his misery. At this point the King of Kuripan entered and asked why he was crying. The following is an edited version of what happens then.ⁱⁱ

Gingsir:	Because Gangsar is dead.
Prince:	But I was chatting to him only this morning.
Gingsir:	He died all of a sudden. He said his stomach hurt, he got

Rather more to the point, Gangsar’s pretended fear at playing dead has echoes. The play is taking place, after all, next to the graveyard and a temple closely associated with witchcraft. Live corpses (*bangké matah*) are used in Calon Arang plays, where there is a very real danger, as happened in Tengahpadang some years after, of several people dying very shortly afterwards.

¹³ My thanks are due to Linda Connor, who has worked on representations of death in Bali over many years and drew my attention to how sharply this scene departed from conventionally appropriate behaviour.

¹⁴ This, I think, is what Alton Becker was trying to get at in his intriguing argument to the effect that Javanese shadow theatre involves multiple epistemologies (1979). My complaint is that he never fully carried through his remarkable insight, but slipped into equating epistemology with Geertzian worldviews, which rather spoiled an important and innovative argument (see Hobart 1982).

- hiccup and died.
- Prince:** (*Obviously moved*) Remember the words of wise priests, you should not cry near to a corpse.
- Gingsir:** Yes.
- Prince:** It makes the passage harder for the soul of the deceased..
- Gingsir:** That's why I'm crying over here!¹⁵

Gingsir said that that costs money. The prince asked if he had any, to which Gingsir said no. The prince told Gingsir he had better go and try to raise the necessary sum, to which Gingsir retorted that Gangsar was his, the prince's, servant and that he should therefore contribute. (This could, if you wished, be taken as a reference to how often people renege on their social obligations these days.) The prince pulled out Rp. 3,000, which Gangsar threw down on the ground in pique, saying what could he do with just Rp. 3,000. Precisely how much money the prince handed over sets up the next scene when the two servants quarrel about dividing up their spoils.

Some local comments

The evening after the play I invited a group of people round and asked them what they thought of the play. The flower-seller said that he liked the version in Tengahpadang much better than the televised version (which I had showed them on video some weeks before). The farmer said that he did not really like either, because he did not like Drama on principle, but confessed that the live performance had made him laugh, while the broadcast had not. The old actor disagreed sharply with them, although he did admit the jokes were far funnier in the live version. He specified in detail the differences and his reasons for preferring the televised version: the dancing was better, their expressions (*semita*) were more developed, their movements (*ambek-ambekan*) were more appropriate to dance and they followed the plot, with the correct stages of its introduction. These are *Panglembar*, the introductory dance which establishes the space for subsequent performance; *Angucap-ucap*, describing the state of affairs; *Mapaitungan*, deliberation, when servants talk over things before attending their masters; *Ngalèmèkin* when the elder of the two servants gives (moral) advice to the younger; *Panangkilan* when they go to the court.

The ex-headman arbitrated. Because he was a professional, the old actor, and only he, realized all the faults. The scene of playing dead was very clever because it hit several targets at the same time. The development of the jokes was much better in the live performance because the audience helped the actors much more than the theatre audience in the televised version, who were stiff and unresponsive. That the storyline was less clearly defined from the beginning was because the troupe had come up planning to do another play and were still struggling to remember the details of the plot. (We had visited the troupe in Denpasar to

¹⁵ Gingsir engages in a play on textual authority, by taking the terms of the text quite literally. It is also therefore rather a nice play on the conditions of referentiality. The full text in Balinese is in an endnote below. The actor playing the prince makes a slip in fact by saying you should not cry near a body which is nearly dead. It is a corpse you must not cry near.

agree the date, venue and payment. We had explained why we wanted Gusti Ayu Ratih. In the meantime however, they had decided that they would prefer to try out a different play, which somewhat defeated the object of the exercise.)

Setting a trap on stage

By this point it should be evident that a full comparison of two versions of the play would require a book in itself. The same would be required for the performances of *Keris Pusaka Sakti* (roughly: The Magical Heirloom Sword). Instead I would like, using a scene from the live version of *Keris Pusaka Sakti*, to develop the point about the openness, what Bakhtin called ‘the unfinalizability’, of dialogic interaction. The scene is significant for what Euro-American theatre people and scholars might call ‘breaking frame’. The image presupposes that the structure of the plot and the actors’ lines are sharply demarcated from the actors’ and audience’s lives. In other words, what we are pleased to call ‘the dialogue’, of the play is all-too-often effectively a fractured monologue, which would be threatened by the possibility of non-mock interaction (rather as most academics dislike students interrupting to ask questions when they are in the full loquacious flow of a lecture).

The scene takes place in the court of Jenggala, where a meeting (*paruman*) is in process between the Queen, played by a famous Arja actress, Ni Rèbu, and her two servants, the Panasar and Wijil, and her Chief Minister, who is however marginal to the following exchange. From what transpired, it looks as if the actors playing the Panasar and Wijil must have plotted beforehand to try to embarrass Ni Rèbu on stage. It is probably not coincidental that this happened while we were recording with several well known local actors, including the old actor and the ex-headman, in the front of the audience. It is also fitting that the exchange occurred during a scene set in Jenggala, the kingdom of the Mad, where the otherwise unsayable is uttered publicly.¹⁶

It began innocently enough. Wijil started singing and begging the Queen’s pardon. She, not realizing what was afoot, told him not to abase himself too much, just to say what he wanted. He sang he wanted to ask for something - a gold ring. Up till now he had only worn silver, he would like to try gold. She asked him angrily if he has any idea how much gold is a gram? He replies:

Wijil: My Lady. I thought you were going around selling gold!
Queen: (*Suddenly realizing what all this preamble has been leading to*)
 Useless creature! What a gob you’ve got on you!ⁱⁱⁱ

Without understanding the associations and context, it might at first sight appear odd that Ni Rèbu reacted by looking discomfitted (*congah*). As the commentators explained to

¹⁶ It is important to remember that both plays were performed at the height of the New Order repression of free speech, when theatre becomes a privileged, if potentially dangerous, occasion to articulate, albeit it indirectly, otherwise unairable views. The present exchange however has a different purpose.

me later, her face indicated fleetingly that the remark had got through to her. As they put it, she *negakin debong*, literally she had sat on a banana stem: you suddenly realize the damp has got through to you. To understand the significance of Wijil's statement requires some prior knowledge, not least about the actors themselves. By way of background, the exchange relied upon the knowledge that Ni Rèbu, who was old and had never married, was widely believed to have taken an oath that she would remain unmarried in return for the gift of becoming a superb actress.¹⁷

When Wijil began to sing, it marked a break from the previous theme of the dialogue. Was it merely a development of the plot or something else? Rather obviously, scripted theatre effectively excludes such possibilities, which keep Balinese actors on their toes at the best of times. To begin with it was not clear, why he was apologizing: it could have been a development of the plot. (Remember the narrative is almost entirely ad libbed. Much of the play is built up on such off-the-cuff digressions.) Wijil referred to wanting to have a gold ring. He had never tried something like that. When Ni Rébu asked him how much he thought gold was worth, she stepped into the trap. She indicated how high a price gold had, but it could as well have been something else that she had of great value to offer, on which however she put an exorbitant price. Wijil's reference to a gold ring, which has of course a hole in it, pointed to the possibility that its referent was the fact that she valued her virginity, or her freedom from marriage (the words the commentators used was ambiguous here), as others do gold - in other words, very highly. That she grasped something was afoot was clear from her reply, followed by her kicking him. As far as I, and the Balinese I have spoken to, know there is no fixed, or generally known, association of rings with women's genitalia. It relies upon a context internal to the performance in question.

She turned then to her other servant, the Panasar, who leapt up kicking his legs out behind him, snapping to attention and replying in Dutch. She told him off and then asked him to sing (everyone knows he has a lovely voice). But he had to smile and not show his teeth at the same time - an impossibility. She had started to exact her revenge. He too was useless, she said, and he would be reborn as a toad hopping about under banana palms looking for food. The Panasar made as if to pull himself together and started to sing. The audience was expecting it to be: 'Singgih Ratu Sri Bupati - my Noble Queen'. Instead he sang 'Singgih Ratu Sri...Rébuwati', her real name, Rèbu, with the common suffix '-wati' for a woman. The queen promptly punched him on the chin and he made as if to stagger off, shaking his head like a boxer who has received a hard punch from his opponent. Boxing at the time was one of the favourite programmes on television. A complicated mixture of shock, merriment, sympathy and perhaps more was elicited when the victims were on the receiving end of hard blows, which were then often mimicked by the viewers.

The Panasar immediately retorted. The exchange hinges on a pun on *sarap*, which is both 'brain' and 'leapt upon by'. The exchange assumes the first sense until the punch line.

¹⁷ The same was said of a fellow actress, which may tell us something about the constraints on able women in what remains in some ways a pretty patriarchal society.

This time the Panasar manoeuvred her into setting herself up, while Wijil was now telling him to lay off.

- Panasar:** Ooh! My brain. (Or ‘I’ve been leapt upon’.)
Queen: You’d be better off dead anyway.
Panasar: Ow! My brain
Wijil: Leave off.
Queen: What brain? (‘Leapt upon by what?’)
Panasar: Leapt upon by a tiger. (*A remark aimed at Ni Rébu’s character as just demonstrated.*)

I have no ground to think the unfolding sequence had been worked out beforehand. Being a good actor in Bali is knowing how to proceed in an open-ended dialogue. It is this skill, born of practice, which is what Balinese intertextuality, if you will, is about. I am not happy though with the expression, because it tends to suggest some pre-existing space or set of categories within which people operate.¹⁸

Everyone greatly appreciated the evening. They agreed that it had a life which the televised version, performed in a recording studio with no audience, had not. The old actor was unstinting. The performers were excellent, he said, because they made the audience laugh constantly and they had no idea what was coming next. (Neither, for that matter, did most of the cast, it seemed.) Ni Rébu in particular was a seasoned (*wayah*) performer, which came out in the way she turned the ambush back on her fellow actors. The commentators all much appreciated how ‘dry’ (*tuh*) she was, a term used in the first instance because she did not burst out in a sweat, as a lesser actress would have. More generally though the term is used of a hardened professional, who avoids showing any feeling of discomfiture or embarrassment on being trapped, taunted or caught out on stage.

The ambush was not a private joke among the actors. The point precisely was to try and catch Ni Rébu out in public. In other words, not only the actors had immediately to catch an oblique reference (selling gold) and follow the twists and turns of the exchange. In order for the ploy to work, so did a significant proportion of the audience. Tengahpadang is known in Balinese thespian circles as producing, on the whole, sophisticated audiences who are adept at obscure sexual innuendo. What works is specific to a given audience though and the actors had gently tested the waters earlier in the evening. Imagine the sensitivity to nuance, associative possibility and the familiarity with the use of a range of speech genres required of at least a part of an audience. The contrast with the stereotypical American or European ‘couch potato’, gawping mindlessly at the television set, could not be starker. Audiences however are not natural entities but, as this last exchange should make clear, are the continually changing outcome of particular viewing practices. The kind of practices required to produce the more sophisticated members of a Balinese Arja audience differ sharply from

¹⁸ A nice critique of the spatial metaphors of knowledge implicit in much post-structuralist writing and the residual idealism which accompanies them is to be found in Lefebvre (1991), who, significantly, was Baudrillard’s teacher.

those which supposedly bring about the ‘dumbing down’ required of television audiences in the current capitalist era. That said, the vision of a global settee-full of viewers made idiotic by the vast machinery of media imperialism and endless bad Hollywood films is very much an élite representation, which itself requires critical examination. The argument is nostalgic. It yearns for a time when it was not thus, or looks to a utopia when the masses will be emancipated, whether they like it or not.

I hope it should be equally clear that the play is not a production which is finalized before its performance, even though the minimal parameters of the plot have, of course, to be set for there to be a play at all. There seems to be no comparable requirement to suspend disbelief as in European theatre. The interpretive version, of course, is the leap of faith into the hermeneutic circle. From my inquiries of spectators, there seemed to be no frame to break in the ambush on Ni Rébu. Each performance, especially ones before live local audiences is unfinalizable, and unrepeatable as the ambush indicates. The whole event hinges upon different sets of relationships working well simultaneously, notably that between audience and actors, and between the actors themselves. Actors continually stressed to me that unless they feed each other phrases, lines, puns and possibilities for others to develop a scene (*saling enyuhin*), everything falls flat. Balinese theatre depends crucially on others to make it happen.

Live or dead?

At the time of filming the plays, the contrasts between television and live local audiences were probably greater than they are at the time of writing. Local audiences increasingly expect plays to be as-seen-on-TV and actors replicate favourite routines (in Derama to the point of tedium). Casts become more adept at coping without audiences and so on. Certain broad differences remain discernible in the two plays discussed. There is greater restraint and formality in the style of dancing, the structure of scenes and speech is more thought through for televised performances. And there is far less attempt to improvise whole sections, although the dialogue is still extemporized. The jokes are more restrained. The actors do not set out to surprise the audience or one another as they may do in live performances. Most people agree actors on television are *aken*, serious, and feel weighed down, *sarat*, by the occasion. Partly, of course, this is because of the draconian censorship imposed by the New Order régime (a topic still in need of research) which takes the edge off the social criticism expected of theatre.¹⁹ The actors themselves though stress that they suffer the constraints of broadcasting to a large, heterogeneous and unknown audience.

¹⁹ As a famous actor put it, because newspapers, schools, universities and the other social institutions (of what is often dubbed ‘civil society’), which are involved in shaping public attitudes are under such tight government control, it is left to actors to be the effective social commentators and critics. Such comment and criticism on television is potentially risky. That is not to say that it is not done, but it is usually indirect: one speech, two objects (*raos asiki tetujon kakalih*). It is up to the audience as active participants to reflect on what is said. They must decide for themselves whether there is more to what takes place than appears at first and what, using the clues provided, they wish to make of it.

When actors complain of performances on television being dead (the word they often used was literally dead, *mati*), they are pointing to the absence of dialogue with the audience. To the actors, the television studio makes their performances closer to monologue.²⁰ In such a dialogic world, we start to see how Europeans and Americans fetishize texts and presume the naturalness of producer-centred models. A Balinese theatre play is the product of a complex agent comprising most notably the organizers of the occasion, the managers and actors of the troupe and the audience. An allure of television is that makes the denial of the complexity of agency easy, by reducing production to creators and stars, and audiences to responses and ratings.²¹ Because audiences are relatively silent compared to the actors does not entail that they are not agents. We confuse activity with agency at our peril. There are many kinds of quiet, including reflection, judgement and waiting. Balinese actors know only too well they have to convince and seduce each new audience.

The older villagers whom I know often complain that television, in combination with other aspects of development in Indonesia, is having deleterious effects.²² They say they fear a generation is emerging which is largely ignorant of the vast repertoire of previous practices, from medicinal cures to command of rhetorical skills. It was ever thus. It may, or may not be the case, that fewer young people appreciate the subtleties of theatre than they did. There is no way to determine the issue. What is the case is that the ‘best’ troupes and new genres like *Séndratari* hog broadcasting time with the result that most of the local theatre troupes have died out and with them much of the regional and local variation in style, which was so striking a feature of Bali. The move to increasing standardization and homogenization is not just due to television, but a broader aspect of the New Order’s vision of culture as a commodity and means of ideological domination. If the debate about political reform (*Réformasi*), taking place as I write, is to succeed, arguably it will have to address the issues of how the old régime articulated the relationship between the polity, economy and ‘culture’.

In the project’s archives, one of the finest plays is of the actor in question excoriating corruption in government and its effects, in the course of a *Séndratari* around the plot from the Mahabharata, where the Pandawa are condemned by their enemies, the Korawa, to exile in the forest. The actions in the play of the leading Korawa provided the basis for a neat analogy. Significantly, this play was televised from the annual provincial Arts Festival and was performed before a large audience. Once again the audience seems crucial.

Obviously though actors have a far freer rein to engage in criticism before a live audience, when they are not being recorded. Johannes Fabian has made the point that such socially critical theatre is quite common and that, when academics capture such live moments of intellectual guerilla warfare, as it were, in writing, they may imperil the people they work with (1991). Academic study in such situations is never comfortable or neutral, but part of the broader argument and so raises inevitable dilemmas.

²⁰ Balinese actors for the most part still adopt a markedly theatrical style on television in such genres as sitcoms and domestic dramas. The reasons deserve study. Lack of experience in the structured informality and intimacy of television as well as the lack of training in television acting may be important.

²¹ On the notion of complex agents, see Collingwood 1942; Hobart 1990b; Inden 1990. The image of agents as being complex helps to counter the Euro-American obsession with condensing agency into a hero figure, the author, playwright, film or stage star. The result is to deny how complicated and open the practices of production themselves are.

²² Much of this is the criticism each senior generation seems to reserve for its successor. If you ask, or people are feeling more reflective, what emerges as a main theme is the power of television over viewers, for good as well as bad.

Unless the reformers come up with a radical counter-articulation, they are liable to discover that they have merely been re-arranging the furniture left by their predecessors.

Some implications

Once we let go of the straightjacket of the inscribed and sacred text, the fantasies of transparent communication, the obsession with perduring essence, manifest as hidden or deeper meaning, the preferred reading or whatever, and the protectively élitist authority of the academic knowing subject, we can start critically to engage with what Balinese actor-dancers are doing.

Let us start with the idea, sufficiently commonplace as mostly to go unchallenged, that theatre is a vehicle for the communication of culture. Other than in the tautological sense that everything is cultural, so any cultural activity by definition reproduces culture, this idea is uninformative. It replicates the mummified ontology I complained about, based here on a mechanical relationship between a fixed form (the vehicle) and a substantialized content (the reality). Such transmission models of communication are so familiar as to seem naturalized. But if we stop and ask what actually is the 'content' of the 'message' in, say, the lengthy exchanges about kinds of cakes, it is minimal. Except trivially, this part of the scene is not referential. If we consider the other possibilities of the transmission model as laid out, say, by Jakobson (1960), they prove of equally marginal relevance. There is little emotive or conative thrust in the patter. The old fallback of this being phatic communication helps little. The medium is not in question, unless the loudspeakers are not working properly, which is a separate issue. Nor is it metalingual, a matter of the code. Everyone understood what was being talked about, whether the studio audience or domestic viewers. Nor is this exchange, aesthetically, commenting on the conditions of its own production.

The scenes discussed make little sense until they are treated as an engagement with the circumstances and the context of that particular performance. (This is something good troupes do well and partly what makes a troupe good.) Significantly then the quality of the play is dependent upon, and so defined by, what is outside it. In other words, you cannot extract the essence of a performance from the contingent circumstances of the occasion. That is what Bakhtin called 'theoretism', insisting on understanding events in terms of rules or structures and failing to appreciate how particular, open and unfinished they are. 'We cannot break out into the world of events from *within* the theoretical world. One must start with the act itself, and not with its theoretical transcription' (Bakhtin 1984-5: 91).

A related argument has been advanced by Mark Poster, one of the more thoughtful critics in media studies. Poster criticized transmission models of communication for reifying and fetishizing information at the expense of appreciating mediation as involving different kinds of social practice, which necessarily constitute knowledge, language and its subjects or objects differently (1990).²³ Television itself, he argued, belonged to a broadcast model of

²³ For example,

communication, a media age which is increasingly superseded by a new age of interactive media (1995), which requires us radically to rethink of our presuppositions about communication, its subjects and objects. Poster takes interactivity to be a function of new technologies. As the scene outlined above shows, it has presumably always been around, but has been sidelined by the dominant epistemological fashion.

To take an example, which at first sight could not be more different, Poster argues informational models of television advertisements make no sense. Advertisements are not about scientific and representational logic. So it is inane to ask if people 'believe' them, any more than to claim they are a means of irrational manipulation. Rather

the ad shapes a new language, a new set of meanings...which everyone speaks or better which speaks everyone (1990: 58).

As a language/practice the TV ad undermines the type of subject previously associated with the capitalist mode of production and with the associated forms of patriarchy and ethnocentrism. Though it substitutes the subject as spectator/consumer it also deconstructs the subject as a centred, original agent... The receiver of the message thus plays two roles, one as manipulated, passive, consumerist *object* of the discourse, another as judge, validator, referent *subject* of the discourse. Constituted as both object and subject, thing and god, the viewer is presented with the impossibility of the position of the subject, the basic insubstantiality of the subject (1990: 67).

Advertisements create their own context and show the inadequacy of representational models. They destabilize the relationship of referent, object and subject. If advertisements, which are 'the extreme tendency of the media region of the mode of information...a monologic, self-referential communication' (1990: 67), threaten the ontology of communication they supposedly exemplify, then developing an analytical frame for the open-ended, situation-specific interactions of Balinese theatre and its appreciation will prove quite a complex undertaking. My aim here is simply to introduce some possibilities.

Poster retains the language of message, referent, sender/receiver, which a more radical version of Baudrillard would undermine. The object-subject duality also remains, with the audience being at once subject, object and referent. A strength of the analysis however is that

the mode of signification of the classical capitalist period was the representational sign. The social world was constituted in the figure of 'realism' through signs whose stable referents were material objects. The medium of exchange that held together signifier and signified was reason. The communicative act that best exemplified the representational sign was reading the written word. The stability and linearity of the written word help to constitute the subject of reason, a confident, coherent subject who spoke the language of realism through signs whose highest ideal was the discourse of natural science (1990: 61).

Poster develops an explicitly Baudrillardian argument, which undermines the solidity and self-evident referentiality of much academic writing. No wonder so many scholars have their knives out for Baudrillard. Poster does not however take on board fully the implications of the Baudrillardian critique, which would require a more fundamental ontological revolution than he has yet acknowledged.

it recognizes the extent to which the objects of analysis are not static, but are produced and changed by social practices. This process includes notably the act of inquiry itself. (The rise of the science of statistics produced a new object, the average or norm, which in turn made sociology possible, Hacking 1990.) A good example is the important controversy surrounding the nature of the audience. Is it the product of sociologically identifiable processes (Ang 1991; Morley 1992)? Or is it inevitably a textual construction (Hartley 1987)? The debate is haunted by the vestiges of representationism: how best to treat the relationship of text and fact?

Poster points to the problem. 'When an individual watches a TV ad he or she is watched by a discourse calling itself science but in fact disciplining the consuming subject to the ends of rationality and profit' (1990: 49). Theoretical formulations of audiences are underdetermined by biomass, whether distributed on theatre seats, couches watching a cathode ray tube or in statistical columns. Insofar as we can talk about them audiences are the product of social practices which include both textualizing and naturalizing them, and much more beside. For the commentators, the audience in Tohpati was a moment of response, or rather lack of it, which they contrasted with other occasions. For actors performing on stage, it is closer to something disparate and unformed which you reach out to and try to seduce into a malleable interlocutor. For actors in television studios it seems to be closer to something they have to imagine in its absence. Audiences are indeterminate. They are neither subjects, objects, textual constructs, ineffable or definite. As audiences are the necessary (even if only imaginary) condition for a play, the congeries of practices which make up the media event are in turn constitute audiences themselves.²⁴

Some broader considerations

Even from these briefly examined extracts a number of more general issues emerge. I wish to develop two of these. These are the light Balinese theatre sheds on dialogic analyses and upon received ideas about communication. The rediscovery of the work of Bakhtin and Volosinov, especially in American anthropology and cultural studies, has led to what was a critical approach to language and texts paradoxically being cited in support of what it set out to repudiate (see some of the contributions to Clifford and Marcus 1986). Balinese theatre and critical dialogism however inform one another in interesting ways, which argue for rethinking our models of communication.

On almost any reading, dialogue is central to the work of Bakhtin, who used the term in at least three rather different senses in different contexts. Dialogue emerges as the mode of

²⁴ Audiences are logically necessary (see Bakhtin on 'the super-addressee' below), but practically contingent, to the performance of a play. The point is that neither theatre plays nor audiences are essences. They depend for their existence on conditions outside themselves and so involve the deferment I have noted. Ernesto Laclau makes much use of the notion of 'the constitutive outside' (e.g. 1990, 1996), which he derives from Staten's (1986) reformulation of Derrida's work. At its best it is a sophisticated device for revealing and undermining pervasive essentialism, by pointing out the degree to which supposedly autonomous entities depend for their identity and existence upon external accidents.

all utterance, in the sense that it is an extra-linguistic element opposed to logic. In dialogue there is always an addressee, that is the persons to whom the speech as a whole is addressed.²⁵ In Bali this is the theatre audience. Television inhibits this dialogue, but does not eradicate it: the addressee is still there, but under different discursive conditions. There is also a super-addressee: the audience in yet another form. That is the imagined, but immediate, interlocutors whom, in the last resort, the speaker is most concerned should understand him or her, be they Divinity, an ideal colleague, the truly informed and appreciative spectator. Then there is dialogue in the sense of complex utterances which contain within themselves the recognition of polyphony. Lastly there is dialogue as a global notion, with truth itself as dialogic.²⁶ Dialogue shatters the monolithic nature of ideology, by pointing out that it is an articulation made by agents to which there always has been, and in due course will be, counter-articulations.

Bakhtin gave various sketches of what he had in mind by polyphony and they seem to link closely in some respects to what Balinese actors are engaged in. Polyphony is distinct from heteroglossia, that is the use of heterogeneous utterances which combine different styles of speaking or speakers' subject positions into a multi-vocal or multi-generic complex. Polyphony suggests the coexistence of different historical consciousnesses. It presupposes beings who are situated, partly autonomous and irreducible to any single summative consciousness, usually that of the author or academic analyst. A truly polyphonic work would consist of a 'plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices' (1984a: 6). This stands in contrast to the surplus of vision which authors of monologic works (whether novels, plays or ethnographies) have over their characters and by means of which they finalize and close the narrative.

In one sense Balinese theatre exemplifies a significant degree of polyphony insofar as the actors develop their characters as beings in their own right and do not just go through the motions of patching together bits and pieces from past performances. When Bakhtin wrote about polyphony, he had in mind the singularly complex works of Dostoevsky where characters take on a life and a destiny of their own, such that the author is no longer in charge of the novel. With the circumscription of rôles available to characters I have yet to see a Balinese play in which polyphony in this sense has been explored in depth. It seems however a distinct possibility awaiting a suitable group of Balinese actors. It would be ethnocentric to judge Balinese by criteria worked out for a Russian novelist and find them wanting. The

²⁵ Bakhtin's senses of dialogue are not therefore to be confused with the commonsense English usage, which is often not dialogic, as when an author farms out a single monologic idea between different speaker-functions.

²⁶ This encompassing sense goes beyond my present concerns. Bakhtin explained what he meant by consciousness and human life itself being dialogic as follows.

The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium (1984b: 293).

singular nature of extemporized multi-authored theatre in Bali invites us to reconsider and develop the notion of polyphony to see where it leads.

The discussion has implications for a more critical understanding of communication. Unless you are prepared to commit yourself to a fairly trenchant form of *a priori* idealism (in which case there is not much point in ethnographic inquiry because what is possible and recognizable is already predetermined), it is evident that ideas and relationships are mediated in different ways, be these through actions, utterances, acts of representation in different situations by different kinds of agents (these situations and agents being themselves the outcome of previous mediations). Pure logic, as C.S. Peirce appreciated over a hundred years ago, is itself necessarily mediated by signs. In the world of the pure unmediated object you would have no means of speaking, or even thinking, about what you knew. A brain in a bottle would have a fuller mental life.

Theatre cannot therefore represent cultural values or ideology, because they do not exist other than as transcendental possibilities, except through acts of mediation. This throws the emphasis upon the quality, occasion and circumstances of those acts. The commentators chose the plays they did because they remembered them. The performances did something for and to them. Without the superiority of an academic knowledge, which is guaranteed independent of any possible experience, we become much more dependent upon the knowledge of our subjects of study. In other words, the gulf between the interpreting expert and the experiencing local is a false dichotomy created by transcendentalizing the object of study. It is not that there are not differences in intellectual practices and interests. Evidently there are. It is that the worlds of the two intersect less than the expert often likes to imagine.

The result is to swing attention towards the circumstances under which different representations are made, how assertions about structures, knowledge and truth came to be articulated in the first place. Articulation then emerges as a crucial notion.²⁷ The point of articulation is that it brings together how ideas are related with the social and political practices through which they are mediated on specific occasions. So the linkages are not determined or absolute, but inevitably open to challenge. Because articulation is a notion mostly developed in post-Marxist and cultural studies, its implications for theories of communication have gone largely unnoticed. The dominant mechanical models are also remarkably idealist. There is some ideal state of affairs, message, meaning which it is the task of communication technology to transmit or represent as perfectly as possible. The medium is something that gets in the way of the replication of transcendental perfection. Socially, its ideal is the state of communion, the utopian and imaginary condition of a community.

A stress upon articulation by contrast places attention firmly on the circumstances, purposes and consequences of mediation, and so on the theme of the collection, 'mediatization'. Instead of imaginary states - note the staticness - of communion, the sort of

²⁷ For some of the more important recent works developing Gramsci's original notion, see Hall 1996; Laclau 1990; Slack 1996.

theory of communication appropriate here is one which has some bearing on interaction considered as dialogic. Dousing the academic wet dream of 'imagined communities', Srinivas once remarked that villages are back-to-back communities. Rather than being structured according to some single homogenizing principle, people relate to others in all sorts of different ways, including cajoling, seducing, deceiving, bullying, avoiding and ignoring one another. It is this which at once divides and unites them. The dream of escape, the moment of communion or whatever are commentaries on, and incomprehensible apart from, the conditions of antagonism in which people live.²⁸ A study of communication should start then with what communities do, not what in their fantasies academics would like them they do.

What is at issue in considering articulation (and so mediatizing) is not simply a matter of picking whichever happens to suit your immediate needs, as in some intellectual supermarket. The approaches I have considered are part of complexes of world-ordering historical practices, each with its implications and entailments. That hardly perennial, the idea of a text with a distinctive or unique meaning, which is changed by the advent of electronic mass media, remains on the whole part of an epistemological régime, which recognizes the existence of the masses only to abrogate to itself an élitist right to understand, enunciate and inform the masses about the meaning and the consequences of mediatization. Even the imagery of comparability or commensurability is part of the theoretized model: there are essential attributes, which can be measured, independent of contingent practice. To the extent that Balinese are coming to use it – for example in university education - to study themselves, theoretism becomes hegemonic. The fact that the sorts of societies which anthropologists conventionally studied have appeared primitive, irrational, disinclined to abstract propositional thought is partly because the social practices in question have been articulated according to an architectonic logic, which cannot appreciate, but only transmogrify and hierarchize itself relative to them. Theatre is one of a number of recognized and powerful modes of articulation by which Balinese set about understanding and commenting on the world into which they find themselves thrown. They do so using distinctive intellectual practices, which the participants themselves understand rather better than academics usually grasp.

What can such a study of Balinese theatre contribute to the issue of performance and mediatization more generally? There is an apocryphal story about a couple in a snazzy car, who are hopelessly lost in the countryside. Coming upon a local yokel, they ask him the way to their destination. He replies that, if he were trying to get there, he wouldn't start from where they were now. Something similar holds for mediatization. As a loose umbrella term for what happens when electronic mass media become part of everyday social practice, it is unexceptionable. The trouble is that, refracted through our academic metaphysics, it turns all too easily into the question of how does the medium affect the message. Then I fear we are not only starting at the wrong point but, for reasons I have argued, we are destined to drive

²⁸ I use the word antagonism, following Laclau and Mouffe 1985, to refer to the conflicts in which people are engaged in their social life, which are at once logical and practical (what they call material). The notion of antagonism avoids a residual dualism between mind and body, logical contradiction and material conflict.

endlessly round intellectual backwaters in our smart theoretical vehicles, no doubt enjoying the view, but going nowhere.

Perhaps the simplest way of explaining why is to rethink what happens in terms of practice. On this account, all theatre and television consists of different degrees and kinds dialogic performances, be these among actors; between scriptwriters, actors and producers; between actors and audiences; between the producers (however conceived) and their targets; among viewers themselves; between one performance and its predecessors and successors; between ways of imagining the world. The miracle of academe is how this dazzling richness, diversity, unexpectedness gets cut down into a drab and tedious monologue.

Texts, media, form *versus* content, meaning, codes are the familiar language by which academics extrapolate from the way the world is (Goodman 1972) and hypostatize it, by inventing a tame, convenient, portable, studiable and almost wholly imaginary object. Up to now, we have been able to get away with the illusion that this was accepted, proper, indeed hallowed, intellectual practice. That it failed to engage with how Balinese set about performing, enjoying and criticizing their theatre was their problem not ours. The excuse that once such events might have been difficult to record, still less present, is now visible worn to the bare thread it always was now that multimedia formats are no longer nerds' wet dreams. By contrast, I am suggesting that we consider not just unrecorded theatre performances, but all the occasions on which they are reproduced and enjoyed, as congeries of practices. Such a dialogic analysis cannot be achieved by theoretical introspection or speculation, but requires new kinds of engagement with Balinese theatre and its audiences. The study of mediatization would be the inquiry into all the new kinds of practice, which electronic media have brought about, not least the authenticizing of unrecorded performances. It is not television which has killed off 'live' performance so much as the activities of experts.

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ⁱ Below are the original Balinese transcripts. The translation is a collaborative effort on the part of the commentators and me.

Gingsir: Bih! Jaja batun bedil. ‘Sar
Gangsar: Uwuh.
Gingsir: Mara, mara eni lais pesan batun bedilé.
Gangsar: Dija? Dija ento?
Gingsir: Di Kuwait ajak di Irak, lais batun bedilé.
Gangsar: Cai batak nepukin lawat dogén, cai suba orahang cai lais. Ais!

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Gingsir: Bangké, malaib macengeng. (*Nangis*) Aduh. Aduh. Aduh. Aduh. ‘Sar. Aduh.
Raja Manis: ‘Sir. Cara anak cenik pusuh gelur-gelur, ngudiang bena kéné gebyag-gebyug kanti eni, jeg?
Gingsir: Indayang aksi. (*Nangis*).
Raja Manis: Ajak ngaraos jeg jalema apa?
Gingsir: I Gangsar padem, Déwagung!
Raja Manis: Ngah?
Gingsir: I Gangsar padem, parekané.
Raja Manis: Nyaman cainé, I Gangsar?
Gingsir: Inggih.
Raja Manis: Yih! Tuni semengan asané iya maan ngorta.
Gingsir: Nadak ipun padem.
Raja Manis: Nadak?
Gingsir: Inggih.
Raja Manis: Anak kènkèn ladané unduké?
Gingsir: Majarang basang ipuné sakit maclekutan, padem raris ipun.
Raja Manis: Bah! Basangne sakit acepok sing dadi tulungin lintas mati?
Gingsir: Inggih, clekutan ‘Tu, raris padem.
Raja Manis: Ngeh Ratu. Gangsar!
Gingsir: (*Nangis*)
Raja Manis: Luwung rasané panes enu kéto.
Gingsir: Wawu pesan pegat angkiang pun, ‘ten anget kantun bangkén ipuné. Inggih.
Raja Manis: Bih! Inget gelah tekni pawacanan Ida Sang Maraga Pradnyan, Bagawanta. Sing dadi sing koné anak pangelingan anak makiré mati.

Gingsir: Inggih.
Raja Manis: Anak mati ngamasin keto apang sing ngandeg lampah Sang Hyang Atma.
Gingsir: Titiang edoh titiang ngeling apang ‘ten kena iyéh mata iya.

ⁱⁱⁱ The following is the Balinese for the relevant sections of the exchange.

Wijil: (*Magending*) Nanging geng pangampura.
Putri Mataum: Bih, nah! Edaja buin sanget misi geng pangampura para, apa lakar uningang cai?
Wijil: (*Magending*) Nanging, Ratu sampunang sengu.
Putri Mataum: Sing ento. Nguda gelah cai parekan gelah nguda gelah pedih?
Wijil: (*Magending*) Wénten pacang lungsur titiang.
P. Mataum: Uh! Ada bakal tunas cai mena apa?
Wijil: (*Magending*) Ali-ali duwanin Ratu ngadol emas.
Putri Mataum: Kakin jalema, kakin jalema sing ngelah gaé, bungutné jalema totonan.
Panasar: Béh!
Putri Mataum: Tegakang ibaé!
Wijil: Kenehé sing kèni bungkung pérak eni, apang taèn mabungkung emas kèto kenehé.
Putri Mataum: Bangun tegakang iban caié!
Wijil: Béh! Sing kanggo aturé ento, koné sing duka kéto.
Putri Mataum: Kadèn anak apa? Ngalèklèk? Dong cai jeg nagih nunas emas tekin gelah. Apa sekayan cai gedéjaé jang cai di Puri, aji kuda kadèn cai agram?
Wijil: ‘Atu. ‘ten keliling terus maadolan emas kènten manah titiang!
Putri Mataum: Jalema sing ngelah gaé, jalema bungutné nènènanang. Panasar!...

The Queen invites the Panasar to sing. After various twists and turns he does so.
Panasar: (*Magending*) Singgih, Ratu Sri...Rébuwati!
Wijil: Aduh! Jeg apa atur Belié ento. Rasaang.
Putri Mataum: Melahang iban caine matur. Kènkèn tawang cai, eni mara tangan kiri. Yan eni maan mukul tendas caié bèlèk pèlèngan caié.
Panasar: Nah! Sarap titiang!
Putri Mataum: Depang suba apang cai bangsa.
Panasar: Nah! Sarap!
Wijil: Depang.
Putri Mataum: Sarap apa?
Panasar: Sarap macan!
Putri Mataum: Melahang ibaé: ‘Singgih Ratu Sri Bupati’.